

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Early Childhood Education Has A Lot Of Benefits For Children With Visual Impairments Especially For Their Educational Development But Most Children With Visual Impairment Donot Have The Opportunity Of Enjoying These Benefits Because They Not Have Access To Any Of Early Childhood Education Facilities In Their Environment. This Paper Examined The Role Of Care Givers And Teachers In The Provision Of Early Childhood Education For Children With Visual Impairments. Skills Of Orientation And Mobility, Self-care And Language Development Should Be Stressed During Early Childhood Education. The Paper Also Discussed The Importance Of Environmental Modification And Some Changes That Need To Be Effected In The Classroom For The Benefit Of Children With Visual Impairment And Suggested Some Ways To Effect These Changes. The Paper Suggested Among Others That There Is Need For Collaboration Between Teachers, Parents And Other Stakeholders In Early Childhood Education For A Successful Pre-school Education Of Children With Visual Impairments.

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, Children With Visual Impairment

Introduction

The Nigerian Society Has Demonstrated Its Concern and Willingness For The Education Of Children At The Pre-primary Level. This Is A Good Idea But Some Writers Opposed The View, For Example, Robinson And Robinson (1968) Opined That The Children Are Not Matured Enough To Learn Complex Skills Demanded By The Preschool Educational Program. They Also Believe That Parental Love And The Fostering Of Children's Emotional Security Is More Important Than Any Educational Programme. Robinson And Robinson (1968). Reissman (1962) Has Earlier Voiced Hisopinions That The Early Childhood Years Should Be Utilized In Grounding The Child In His/her Subculture And That Exposing Him/her To Pre - Schoolprogrammes Which Emphasizes Intellectual Skills Will Impose Middle Class Value On The Child And Destroy The Positive Aspect Of His/her Culture. Elkind (1986) And Weikart (2000) Doubted The Wisdom In Exposing Children Very Early To Formal Education, They Fear That The Short-termed Academic Gains Will Be Offset By The Long-term Stifling Of Their Motivation And Self-initiated Learning. However, Research Conducted By Gormley, Gayer, Philips And Dawson (2005) And Rolnick And Grunewald (2003) Has Evidences That Early Childhood Education Have Positive Influences On Children's Affective, Conceptual And Social Development In The Years To Come.

Visual Impairment Is A Result Of A Functional Loss Of Vision That Are Caused By Eye Disorders Which Include Retinal Degeneration, Glaucoma And Muscular Problems Resulting In Congenital Disorders, Diabetic Retinopathy And Infection (hastings 2021). The American Printing House For The Blind In 2015 Estimated That 61739 School Going Children In The United States Are Legally Blind. The Punch Newspaper Of 18/10/2023 Published A Report By Restore Foundation For Child Sight Which States That 5.5 Million Children In Nigeria Have Visual Impairments That Are Related To Long Sightedness, Short Sightedness Or Astigmatism. Some Of The Types Of Visual Impairments That Children Suffer From Are: Partially Sighted: This Refers To A Visual Problem Where There May Be No Need For Special Education. Low Vision, It Normally Refers To A Severe Visual Impairment And It Is Not Necessarily Limited To Distance Vision. It Applies To All Those Who Are Unable To Read At A Normal Distance Despite The Aid Of Contact Lenses Or Eye Glasses. Legally Blind. It Indicates That The Person Has 20/200 Vision In The Better Eye Which Means A Limited Field Of Vision. Totally Blind, Pre-schoolers Who Are Totally Blind Can Be Taught Via Braille Or Other No Visual Media Aids. Visual Impairment Refers To All Degrees Of Reduction In Vision. Visual Impairment In A Child At Birth May Be Caused By Genetic Anomalies Or Due To Injury To The Developing Visual System.

Vision Is The Major Source Of Information For All Human Beings Fazzi, Signorini. Bova, Ondeï And Bianchi (2005). Studies By Brambrig (2007), Celeste, (2005) And Salt (2005) Show That Children With Visual Impairment Show Significant Lag In Development Compared To Their Peers Who Do Not Have Any Visual Impairment. Never The Less, A Few Studies Show That Children With Visual Impairments On The Average Pass Through Developmental Milestone At Or Around The Same Time As Their Peers Shon (1997), But Etiology, Level And Onset Of Disability Exerts Crucial Efforts On Their Development Celeste (2005). Early Intervention For Children With Visual Impairment Mostly Focus On Orientation And Mobility, Play And Daily Living Skills, (georgen, 1997). These Findings Have Triggered Early Childhood Special Education Studies Addressing The Educational Needs Of These Children. These Children With Visual Impairments Have Educational Needs And That Services Are To Be Provided As Best As Quickly As Possible (council For Exceptional Children (cec) 1994). Early Intervention Is Also Very Crucial Due To Prospectives Such As The Dynamics System Approach (maida And Maccune 1996) And Other Views On The Difference Early Stimulation And Early Childhood Programs Make For These Children (celeste 2005). In This Paper, Early Childhood Education Now Known As Early Child Care Development And Education And Preschool Will Be Used Interchangeably To Mean The Same Thing. The Aim Of This Paper Is To Bring Out The Areas Where Children With Visual Impairments In Early Childhood Education Can Be Helped.

The Federal Republic Of Nigeria (2013) States In The National Policy On Education (npe) That Early Childhood Education Now Known As Early Child Care Development And Education Is The Care, Protection, Stimulation And Learning Promoted In Children From The Ages Of 0 – 4 In Crèche Or Nursery. This Educational Programme Is Very Important For Children Who Have Different Sorts Of Visual Impairments As It Is For Their Normal Seeing Peers. The Policy Does Not Specify Any Separate Arrangement For Children With Visual Impairments Therefore They Attend Their Preschool Education Together With Their Normal Seeing Peers In The Inclusive Classroom Setting. The Federal Government Has Stated The Following As The Purpose Of Early Child Care Development And Education;

- I. Effect A Smooth Transition From The Home To school
- ii. Prepare The Child For The Primary Level Of Education
- iii. Provide Adequate Care, Supervision And Security For The Children While Their Parents Are At Work
- iv. Inculcate Social, Moral Norms And Values

- V. Inculcate In The Child The Spirit Of Inquiry, And Creativity Through The Exploration Of Nature, The Environment, Art Music And The Use Of Toys
- Vi. Develop A Sense Of Cooperation And Team Spirit
- Vii. Stimulate In The Child Good Spirit, Good Habits Including Good Health Habits And
- Viii. Teach The Rudiments Of Numbers, Letters, Colours, Shapes, Forms Etc Through Play. (npe, 2013).

Government Aims To Achieve These Objectives Through The Following;

- I. Set And Monitor Minimum Standard For Eccde Centres
- Ii. Develop And Disseminate Curriculum Materials Such As The Integrated Early Child Care Development (iecd) Policy, National Minimum Standard For The Establishment Of Early Child Care Guideline And All Other Materials That Will Enhance The Implementation Of Eccde
- Iii. Encourage Both Community And Private Efforts In The Establishment Of Eccde Centres Based On Set Standards
- Iv. Make Provision In Teacher Education Programmes For Specialization In Early Child Care And Education And For Retraining Of Teachers
- V. Ensure That Curriculum Of Teacher Education Is Oriented Towards Play – Method
- Vi. Ensure That Eccde Centres Adopt The Following Class Room Ratio (1) Creche Shall Be 1-10 (2) Nursery 1 – 25
- Vii. Develop Suitable Eccde Curriculum For Nation- Wide Implementation
- Viii. Supervise And Control Quality Eccde Centres
- Ix. Make Provision For The Production And Effective Utilization Of Learning And Instructional Materials In Adequate Numbers
- X. And Ensure That The Medium Of Instruction Is The Mother Tongue Or The Language Of The Immediate Community And To This End Will (1) The Orthography Of More Nigerian Languages (2) Produce Text Books, Supplementary Readers And Other Instructional Materials In Nigerian Languages.

The Policy Is Very Good But The Problem We Have Is The Implementation Of The Policy. Most Of The Schools That Have Early Childhood Education Facilities Are Owned And Maintained By Private Individuals Or Organisations. And These Are Not Available In The Rural Areas For Children In The Rural Areas. The Costs Of These Schools Are So High That Many Parents Cannot Even Afford Them. Despite These Laudable Efforts By The Government, The Problem Of Implementation Is Of The Policy Is Standing As A Stumbling Block To The Success Of The Programme, Thus, Many Of These Children Are Still Being Kept At Home Simply Because Parents Are Afraid To Take Them To The School For Fear That Something Bad May Happen To Them Thus The Children Are Over Protected By The Parents.

Early Childhood Education For Pre-schoolers With Visual Impairment

The Early Childhood Education Of Children With Visual Impairments Should Best Be In An Inclusive Classroom Where The Parents Drops The Child In The Morning And Picks The Child After School. Boarding School At This Age Because Of The Child's Problem Should Be Discouraged Because The Child Needs The Love The Parents Seriously At This Age. Researches By Feng And Sass (2013) Has Shown That The Provision Of Basic Special Education Knowledge And Training To Early Childhood Educators Improves Attitudes Towards Students With Special Needs, A Better Awareness Of Inclusion, Personal Expectations And Improved Outcomes For Students With Disabilities Who Are Served Within These Settings. Early Childhood Education Teachers Who Have Received Some Training In Special Education Are Generally More Positive Towards Inclusion Than Those Who Enter The Teaching Field With Limited Knowledge Of Special Education (lee, Tracey, Barker, Fan&yeung 2014). The Complexities Of Vision Lost Goes Beyond A Typical Classroom Learning, Early Childhood Education Teachers Who Have Students With Visual Impairments In

Their Classroom Can – And – Should – Request The Services Of Professionals Who Are Specialized In Visual Impairment And Trained To Work With Children Who Have Vision Loss (fast, 2018).collaboration Between Teachers, Parents, Mobility Specialists And Other Professionals Is Necessary For The Success Of The Early Childhood Education Of Children With Visual Impairments.

Visual Impairment Creates Obstacles In The Development Of Children And Their Independence. Pre-schoolers With Visual Impairments Need Special Care, Additional Help And Some Modifications In Their Regular School Curriculum. The Use Of Assistive Technology Devices Like Low Vision Optical And Videoaids Will Enable Such Children To Participate In Their Regular Class Activities, Braille Books, Books On Tapes And Large Prints Materials Are Helpful. Early Intervention Is Key In The Education Of Pre-schoolers With Visual Impairments Because It Helps Them To Reach Their Full Potential. Early Intervention Typically Focus On Helping The Children Learn Basic Skills They Develop During The First Three Years Of Life Including Cognitive Development, Sensory Stimulation, Motor Skills Etc.

Parent's Involvement In The Education Of Pre-schoolers With Visual Impairments

The Impact Of Visual Impairment On A Pre-schooler Depends On Several Factors Such As Age, Type Of Severity, Type Of Loss And Over All Function Of Children Who Suffers From A Multiple Disabilities May Also Have Visual Impairment Which Causes Cognitive, Motor And/ Or Social And Developmental Delays. A Child Who Is Visually Impaired Can't Have The Learning Opportunities Or The Avenues Available To Other Children Who Are Healthy. The Impact Of Visual Impairment Can Affect A Child's Ability To Perceive, Explore And Understand The World. The Earlier The Child Begins To Explore The World The Better His Growth, Development And Learning Can Begin As Well. The Education Of Pre-schoolers With Visual Impairment Begins With Their Parents And Other Family Members. This Is Because Parents Are The First And Most Important Teachers Of The Child From Infancy Through The Preschool Years. When Parents Talk, Or Sing To A Child, Patting And Playing, Dressing And Feeding Are Natural Teaching Experiences And Learning Opportunities For Children.

Effort Is Needed In The Area Of Determining The Developmental Patterns Of Children With Visual Impairment In Order To Tailor Programs To Each Child And Family's Needs (kesiktras 2009).

Educational Programs For Children With Visual Impairments In The Preschool Should Be Designed To Cover All Developmental Areas With An Emphasis On Orientation And Mobility Skills And Parent-child Interaction (kesiktras 2009). Developing A Sound Assessment Tool To Determine The Developmental Characteristics Of Children With Visual Impairments Since Valid And Reliable Measurement Will Lead To Better Programs Planning And Implementation (kesiktras 2009). Parents And Teachers Or Care Givers Can Help These Children By Providing Stimulating Experiences And Describing People, Objects And Events. The Child Can Be Taught To Explore The Immediate Environment And Become Aware Of The Things That Are Around Him Or Her. By Doing This, The Child Will Be Motivated To Move Close To The Object Either By Crawling Or Walking As The Case May Be. Children With Visual Impairment Learn By Touching, Listening, Smelling, Tasting, Moving And Using Every Residual Vision They Have. The Parents, Teachers Or Care Givers Can Teach The Child Talking, Touching And Playing. Provide The Child With Toys And Ordinary Household Objects That Range In Texture, Weight, Smell Sound And Colour (aph Connectcenternd).

Effect Of Blindness On Early Childhood Development

Children With Visual Impairment In The Preschool Are Mostly Children Who Have Congenital Visual Impairment This Has A Lot Of Negative Effects On The Development Of The Children. Some Of The Areas Affected Are; Psychomotor Development, Mobility, Self-care Social Interaction, Education And Language.

Psychomotor. The Psychomotor Development Of Children With Visual Impairment Is Dependent On The Organisation Of The Inputs To The Nervous System To Build Up Functional Abilities, Behaviour And Learning, Hence Vision Is An Important Source Of External Reality, Helping On Spatial Orientation. Early Stimulation Is The Most Recommended For These Children This Is Because Sensorial Afferents Are Built Up As A Result Of Stimulation To Reach Sensorial Integration and Motor Control, Practice And Repetition Is Necessary. Our Posture And Movement Is Guided Predominantly Through Vision With Some Additional Help from Auditory And Vestibular Afferents. Therefore Balance And Running Would Take More Time For The Children To Achieve. (penchina, Araujo And Ribeiro, 2013) States That Visual Impairment Interferes With Children's Psychomotor Development But Functional Status May Not Be Proportionally Affected even Though Balance Appears To Be Delayed. (penchina Et Al 2013) Discovered That Psychomotor Development Of Pre-school Children With Visual Impairment Is Seriously Affected.

Self-care. Personal Hygiene Is A Big Problem For Pre-school Children With Visual Impairments. They Have Problem In Helping Themselves Combing Their Hair, Brushing Their Teeth, Eating, Wearing Clothes And Lacing Their Shoes. This May Be Caused By Over Protection By Parents And Family Members. For Example, Parents May Not Be Willing To Allow The Child To Engage In Activities Without Help, Feeling Of Pity And Mercy For The Child. Another Thing That Parents Do Is Providing The Child With Over Simplified Environment And Tasks. This Will Limit The Child's Independence. Children With Visual Impairment Cannot See How People Brush Their Teeth, They Cannot See How Clothes Are Worn And So They Cannot Imitate Like The Normal Seeing Children Do. Therefore Their Skills Of Daily Living Are Delayed.

Orientation And Mobility. orientation And Mobility Skills Helps The Children To Develop And Use Their Sense Of Touch, Feeling, Smell And Sound To Identify Their Surrounding And Where They Are. They Child Should Be Taught How To Move Around Safely Using Mobility Aids. Children With Visual Impairment Do Perform Lower Than Their Seeing Age Mates In Functional Mobility Skills But These Differences Disappears At Age Six Because Of The Assistance Given By Care Givers (penchina Et Al 2013). Pre-schoolers Should Be Introduced To Orientation And Mobility Early Enough. The Child Should Be Introduced To The Mobility Cane Even Before The Child Starts Walking. There Are Two Types Of Mobility Canes That Can Be Introduced To The Child At This Stage, These Are Canes With Golf Grip Handle And Canes With Cylinder Handle But Because Of Their Small Hands The Cane With Cylinder Handle Is Recommended (chamberlin Nd)

Orientation And Mobility Instruction For Pre-schoolers Combines Informal Concepts And Skill Development With Informal Instruction In Orientation And Mobility Techniques. The Mobility Instructor And The Family Members Of The Child Should Provide Countless Opportunities For The Pre-school Child To Interpret Sensory Inputs While Exploring, The Child Should Be Taught How To Associate Textures, Sounds, The Child Should Be Introduced To Activities That Will Develop Gross And Fine Motor Skills, Body And Hand Strengths And Coordination So To Help The Child In Using A Mobility Cane. The Child Should Also Be Helped To Comprehend And Utilize Spatial Concepts. The Should Also Be Given Knowledge Of Environmental Concepts, For Example, Identifying Cars, Streets, Houses, Curbs, Rooms And Stair Cases. Pre-schoolers Should Be Taught Mobility Techniques Like Sighted Guide, Room Familiarization, Trailing A Wall, Grasping A Cane, Assembling A Cane And Trailing A Wall With The Cane Early In Life.

Language language Is One Of The Areas That The Children Have Difficulty In Because It Is Hard For Them To Define Objects They Have Not Touched And Explored With Their Hands Which Is Their Sense Of Perception. anderson (1984) Discovered That Language Of Children With Visual Impairment Is More Oriented And That The Word Meaning Is More Limited Than Normal Sighted

Children. In Reality, Severe And Early Impairment Are Likely To Affect The Language Development Of The Affected children. The Differences Are In Part Due To Limited Access To The Environment And To Difference In Verbal Feedback From People Around Them (gunarratne, Nd). Children With Visual Impairment Lack Visual References And Have Reduced Integration Of Information From Their Parents And Peers.

Environmental Adaptation in A Preschool Class Room

The Main Objective Of Environmental Adaptation Is To Adapt The Student's Curriculum, Guard Against Major Injuries And Adapt Materials That The Child Will Use In The Class And The Environment. Paths To Literacy (2023) Listed The Following As Areas To Consider In Environmental Adaptation, These Areas Are; Mindsets, Mobility, The Room And The Activities.

Mindsets: The Teachers And The Aids In The School Should Move From “hands On” To “hands Off” As The Child Grows Towards Independence. This Means That There Should Be No Over Protection From Parents, Or The Teachers, Children Should Be Allowed To Do Things On Their Own As Soon As They Have Been Given The Instructions And Directions.

Mobility: The Children With Visual Impairments Should Be Taught Simple Lessons About The Different Techniques Of Mobility. Allow Them The Freedom To Choose Their Sighted Guide. Allow The Child To Locate The Classroom And Other Facilities In The School Independently Even Though It May Take Some Time.

The Room: The Classroom Is Another Area That Needs Adaptation, The Teacher Or The Care Givers Should Set The Classroom And Should Not Be Changing The Class Settings Frequently. The Setting Should Be Maintained For Atleast One Year. The Student Should Be Allowed Into The Class Early Enough To Sit Before Any Class Activity Starts. Teachers Should Use Braille To Label The Things That Are In The Classroom. For Pre-schoolers Who Do Not How To Read Yet, Special Textures Should Be Used To Help The Children Identify Certain Things In The Rooms. Other Areas Of Adaptation In The Classroom Should Include; Teachers Should Use Curtains And Blinds On Windows To Control The Level Of Illumination At Different Times Of The Day And To Avoid Glare. Non Reflective Surfaces Should Be Used To Eliminate Glare From Overhead Lights. Individual Lighting Should Be Used To Focus On A Specific Task.

Activities: Adapting The Activities Is Not Necessarily Difficult. Real Materials Are Always Better Than Replicas Or Plastic Version The Real Materials Should Be Provided For If They Are Available. The Book Corner In The Classroom Should Have Braille Books And Story Books In Braille. Most Nursery School Art Projects Can Easily Be Turned Into 3d Art. All The Pre-schoolers Should Have Access To The Materials Like Doilies, Wood Bits, Foam, Cotton, Etc.

Conclusion

The Government Of The Federal Republic Of Nigeria Has Seen The Need For Early Childhood Education And Thus Included It In The National Policy Of Education. The Early Childhood Education Of Children With Visual Impairment Is Even More Important Than That Of Their Normal Seeing Peers Because They Need To Develop Some Skills That They Need To Acquaint Themselves With Before Getting Into Primary School. It Is Because Of This That The Teachers, Parents, And Other Stake Holders In The Preschool Education Of Children With Visual Impairment Should Collaborate To Help These Children. More Attention Should Be Paid To The Area Of Psychomotor Development, Orientation And Mobility, Environmental Adaptation And Language Development Of The Children.

Suggestions

There Is Need For Teachers To Be Trained In Early Childhood Education Particularly Those For The Education Of Children With Visual Impairment. This Should Be Included In The Curriculum Of Teacher Training Programme Of Special Education And Regular Teachers

- I. The Need For Collaborative Efforts Between Teachers, Parents And Other Stakeholders In Early Childhood Education Must Be Stressed For A Successful Preschool Education Of Children With Visual Impairments
- Ii. Inclusive Education Is Also An Issue To Be Considered By Schools That Admits Children In In The Early Childhood Classes, This Is Because These Children May Be Attending Pre-primary Education In Schools Where Children Without Visual Impairments Are Attending. Teachers Attitude And The Attitude Of Care Givers Is Of Paramount Importance For A Successful Inclusion Of The Child
- Iii. School Administrators Should Ensure That The School Environment Is Made Inclusive For All Children In The Class Including Those With Visual Impairment. There Should Be An Environmental Modification In The School Because Of The Presence Of That Child
- Iv. Parents Of Children With Visual Impairments Should Be Involved In The Preschool Education Of Their Children. This Is Because Parents Are The First Teachers Of Their Child. They Should Liaise With Different Professionals Like Orientation And Mobility Specialists, Ophthalmologist, Optometrists, Regular Teachers And Special Educator Who Will Offer Them Useful Assistance In The Training And Up Bring Of Their Child. Over Protection Of The Child Because Of His Visual Impairment Should Be Discouraged Completely
- V. Schools That Practice Inclusive Education School Make The Inclusive Classroom Accessible For Pre-schoolers With Visual Impairments. They Should Not Be Denied Admission On The Basis Of Their Handicaps.
- Vi. Language Development Should Be Stressed In The Preschool, Teachers, Parents And Care Givers Should Be Encouraged To Speak To The Child And Also Encourage The Child To Always Communicate With Them
- Vii. Government Should Be More Involved In The Education Of Pre-schoolers With Visual Impairments. Government Should Go Beyond Making The Policy But Move A Step Further To Ensure That Everything Contained In The Policy Is Implemented To The Later, This Involves Supervisionand The Provision Of Learning Materials As Stated In The Policy
- Viii. Parents And Caregivers Of Children With Visual Impairments Should Begin Orientation And Mobility Early As Soon As The Child Starts To Crawl, This Should Start Early So That The Children Will Not Be Too Affected. Parents Should Seek Help From Professional Orientation And Mobility Specialist And Teachers Should Ensure That The Children Are Allowed To Explore The School Environment Freely.
- Ix. Parents Of Children With Visual Impairments Should Introduce Them To Self-care Early Enough, This Will Reduce Dependency On People Later Inlife. They Should Be Introduced To Daily Living Skills Earlytoo, This Will Help Learn How To Perform Their Daily Chores Before They Grow Up.

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